A BUDDHIST'S GUIDE TO ASURA'S WRATH PART 3 – THE MIGHTY VAJRA

Posted 07 March 2012
By Richmond Lee

- A Buddhist's Guide to Asura's Wrath Part 1 – Buddhist Cyborgs and the story of the Asura
- A Buddhist's Guide to Asura's Wrath Part 2 – The Bishop's Staff and Hungry Ghosts
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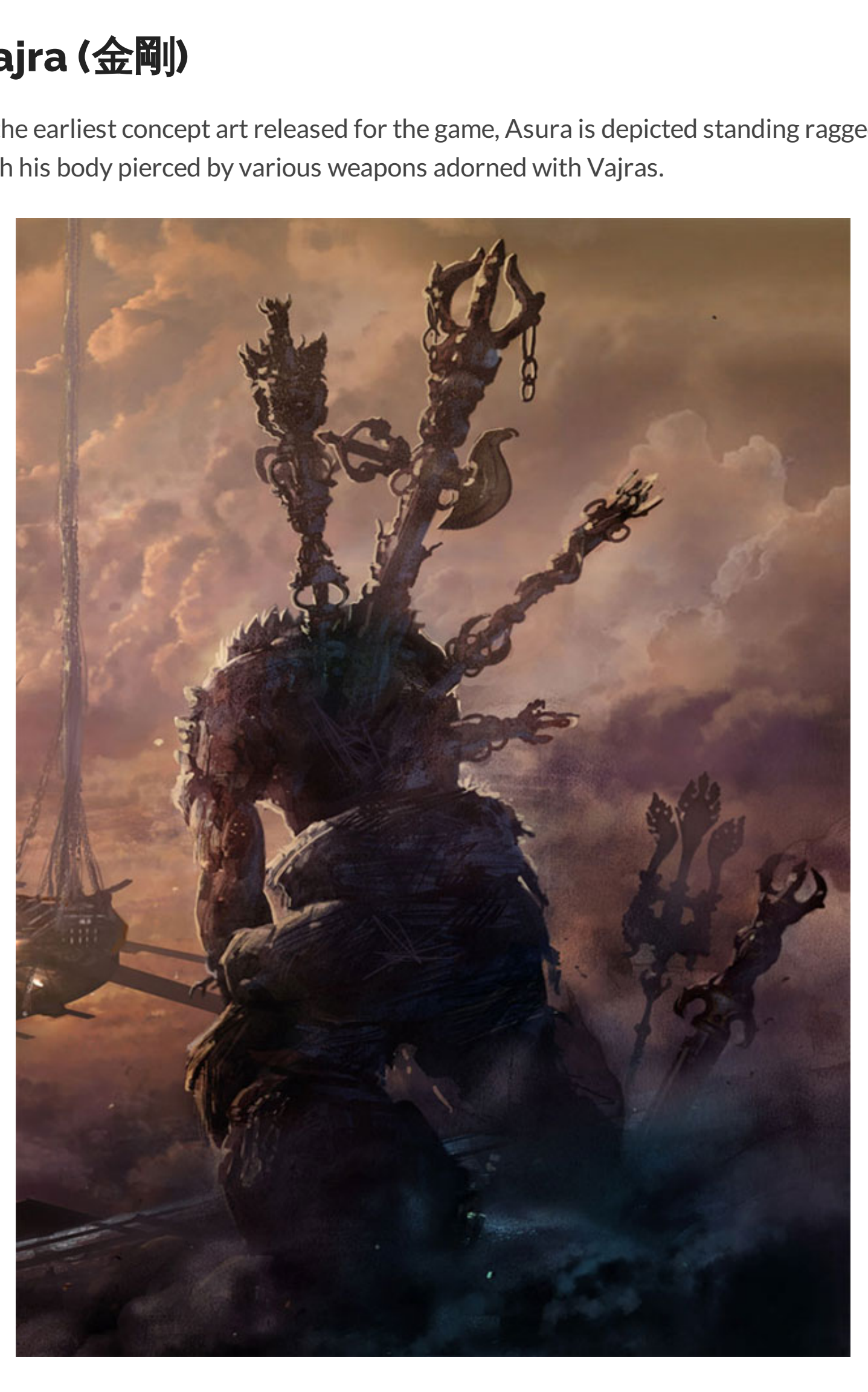
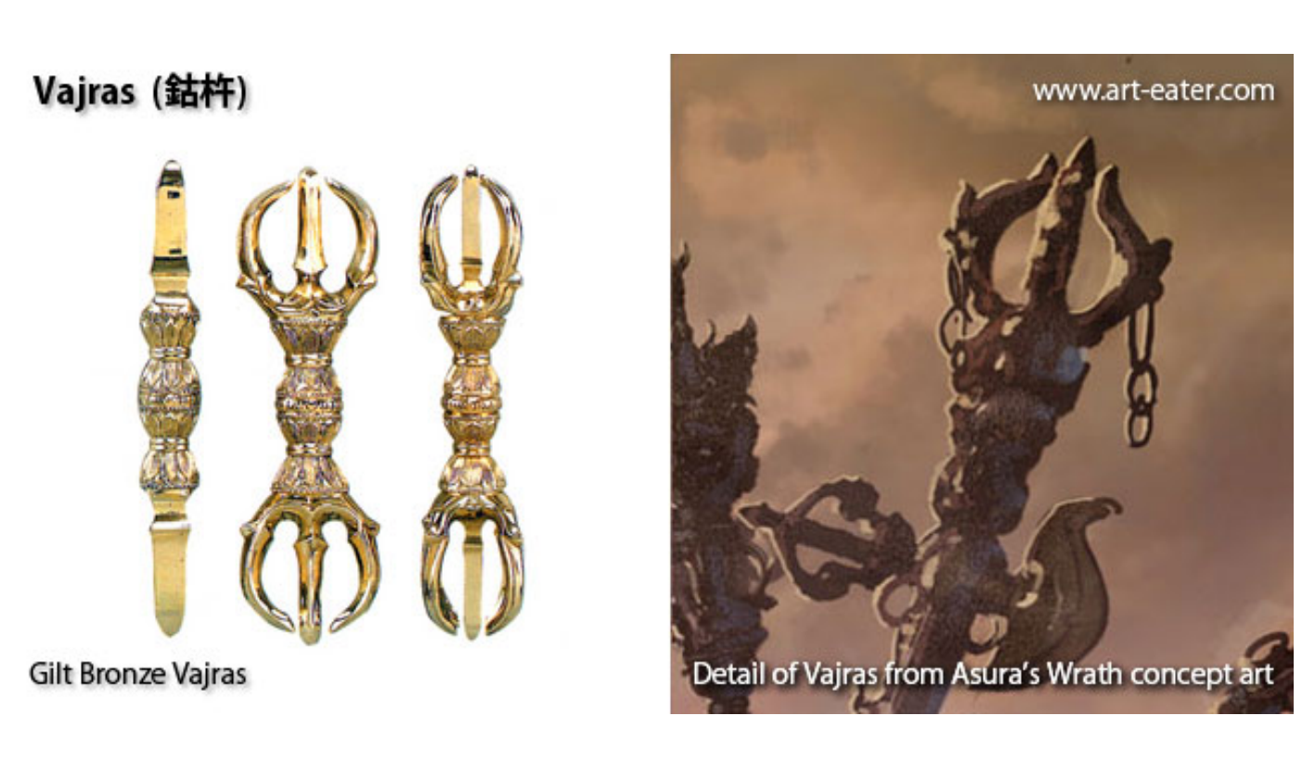
Vajra (金剛)

In the earliest concept art released for the game, Asura is depicted standing ragged with his body pierced by various weapons adorned with Vajras.



The Vajra is an iconic symbol of Buddism, but not as well known in the West.

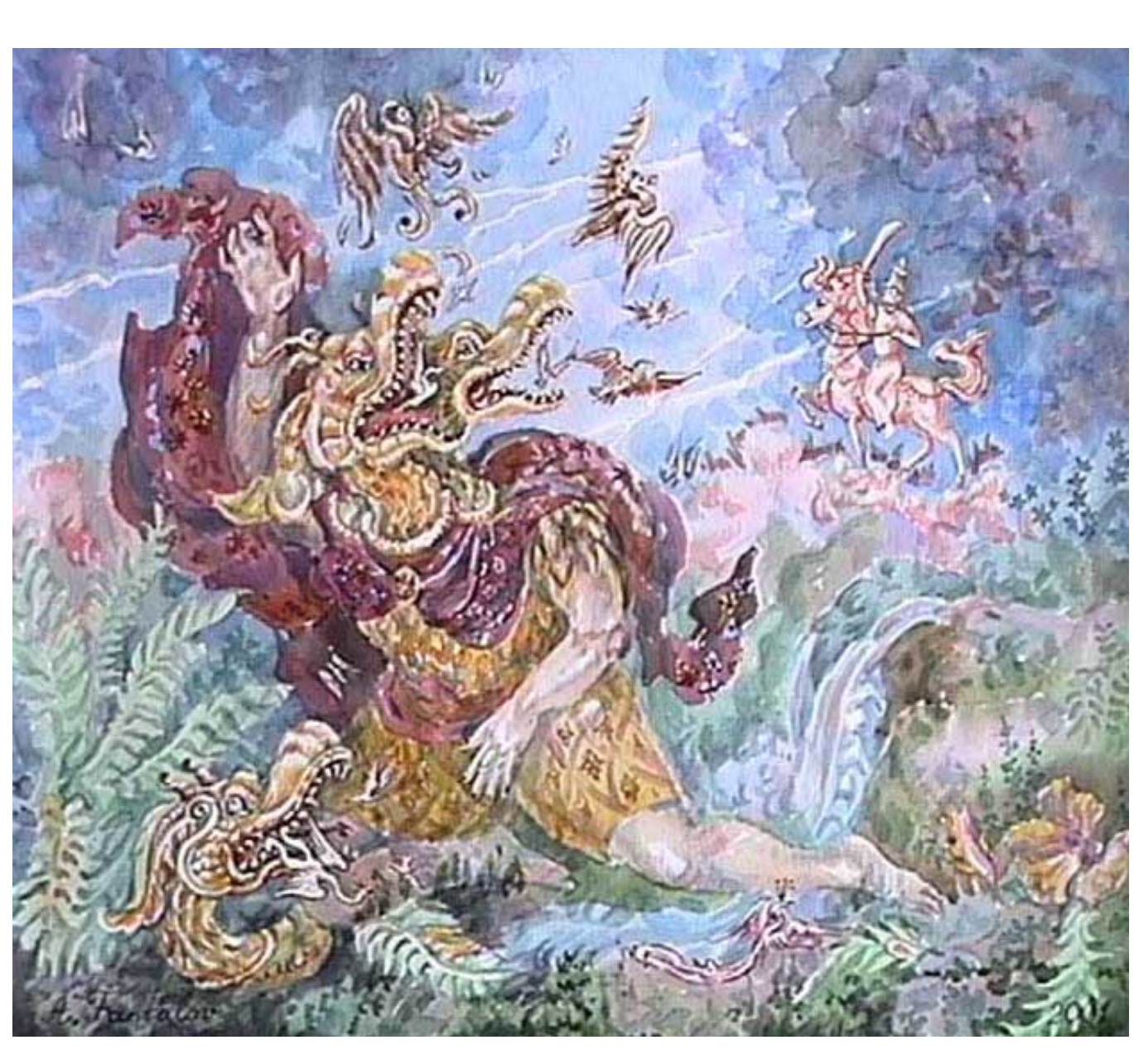

Vajras (鈷杵)
Gilt Bronze Vajras
www.art-eater.com
Detail of Vajras from Asura's Wrath concept art

In Sanskrit it means both thunderbolt and diamond and bears their symbolic properties as an unbreakable weapon that slices through any substance with irresistible force.

The Vajra is first mentioned in Indian Vedic texts (originating from 1700 BCE, predating Buddhism!), where it was wielded by Indra, king of the devas, to fight against the Asura, Vritra (often described as a dragon or serpent) who had swallowed up all the life giving waters of the world.

A Tibetan representation of Vritra. As you can see, he is strongly associated with Dragons.

This Asura had a specific boon (a wish granted by a god) where he could not be killed by any weapon forged of metal or wood, making him impervious to all known weapons and allowing him to take over Indra's kingdom. In the quest to defeat Vritra, the great sage Dadhichi willingly gave up his life so that the devas could craft the ultimate weapons from his bones. Thus Tvashtar, smith of the devas created the first Vajra from Dadhichi's spine (some sources say his thigh bone or skull). Wielding the Vajra, Indra struck down Vritra and restored water to the world.

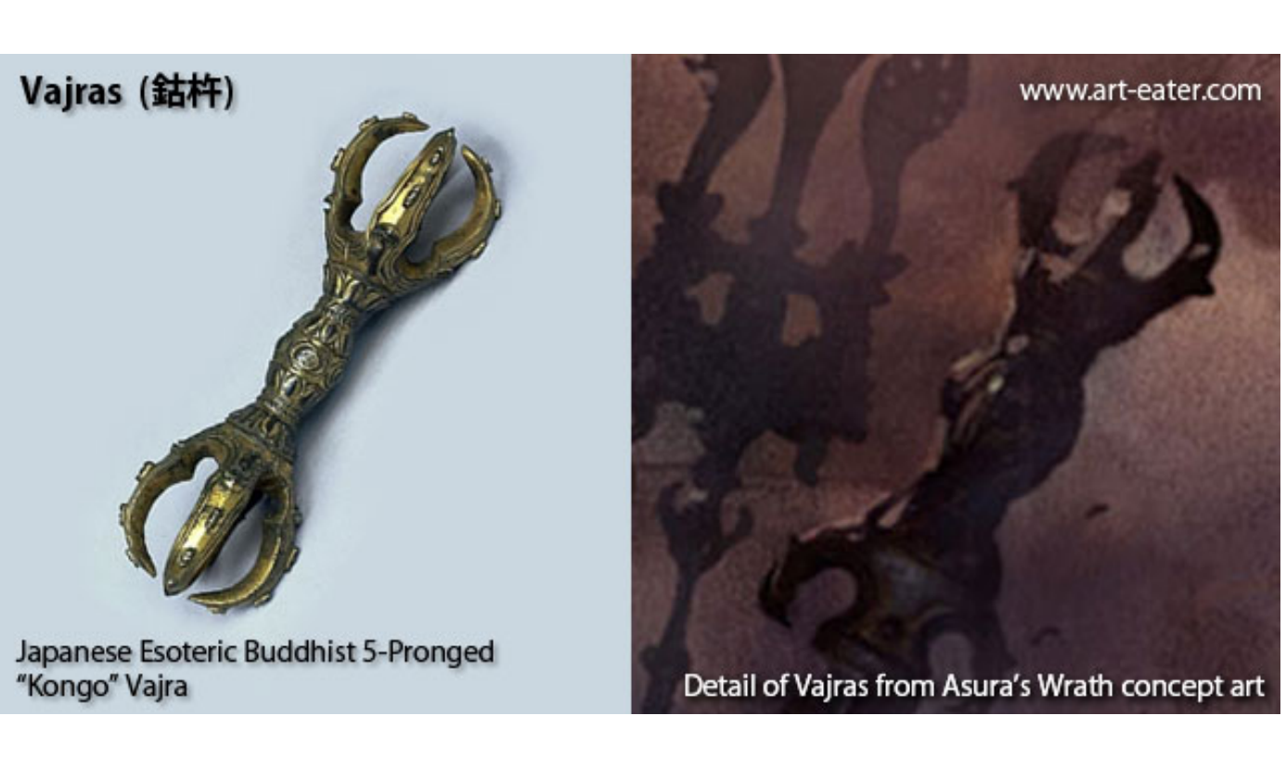


Awesome Hindu painting of Indra striking down Vritra with the Vajra, depicted here as a sword

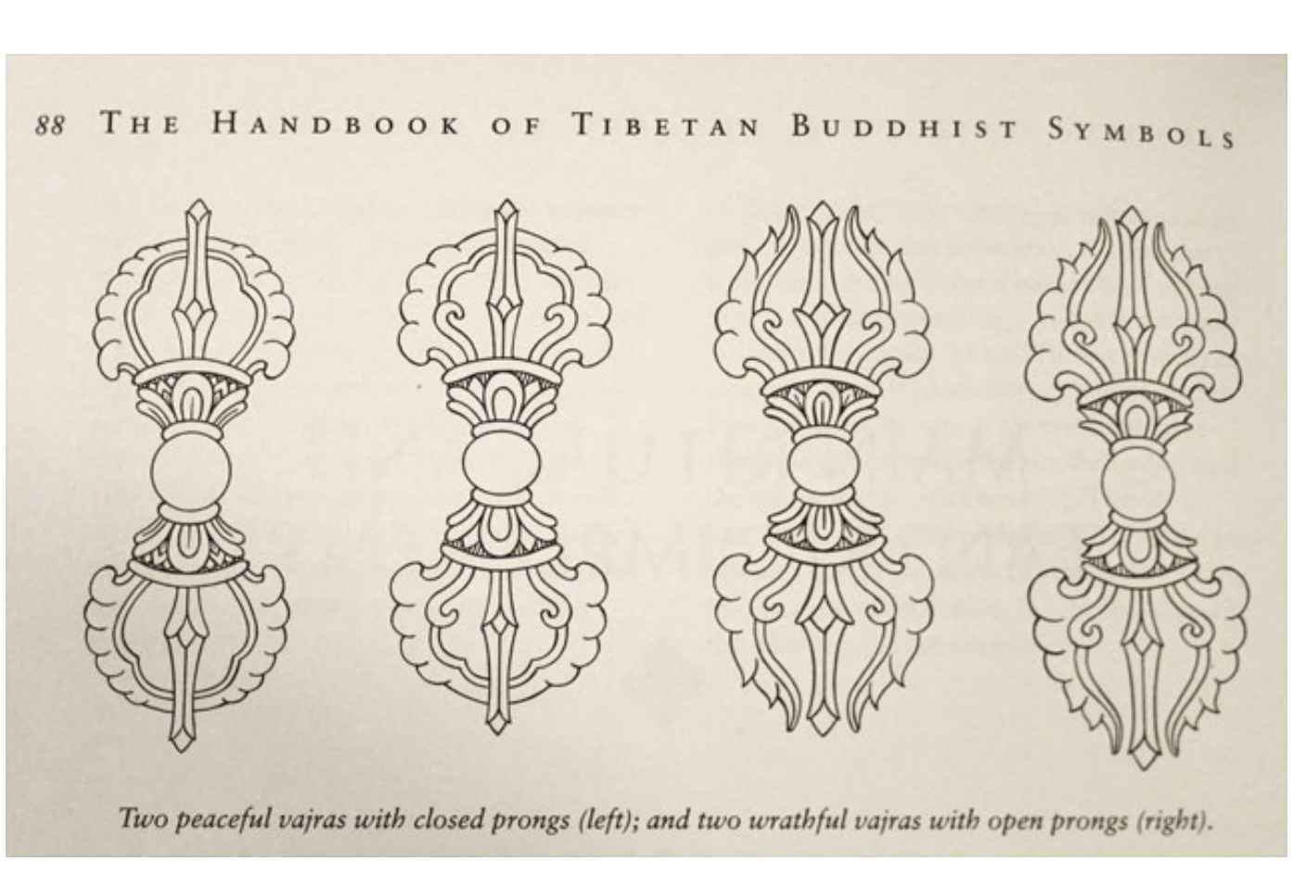
The Vajra is one of the most wide spread Buddhist symbols. It appears regularly in Mahayana Buddhist art and is especially ubiquitous in Tibetan Buddhism, which falls under the Vajrayana School, which takes its name directly from the Vajra ("Vajrayana" literally means "The Thunderbolt Way"). Lightning strikes more frequently in the Himalayas than almost anywhere else on earth (second only to central Africa), so it makes sense that the Vajra would spring up as such an important symbol in this region of the world. The Vajra has become an important symbol in Buddhist and Hindu art the world over.

Tibetan's have an awesome custom of forging Vajras out of iron from meteorites!

In Vedic and Hindu art, the Vajra is depicted in many different ways including as a club, a sword or even a discus with a hole in the center. In Buddhist art (including that of India), the Vajra is very most often depicted as a hand held weapon that consists of a single handle with a trident on each side. The trident tips are usually curved inward, representing the Buddha symbolically bending the prongs of this ultimate weapon to turn it into a peaceful scepter.


Vajras (鈷杵)
Japanese Esoteric Buddhist 5-Pronged "Kongo" Vajra
www.art-eater.com
Detail of Vajras from Asura's Wrath concept art

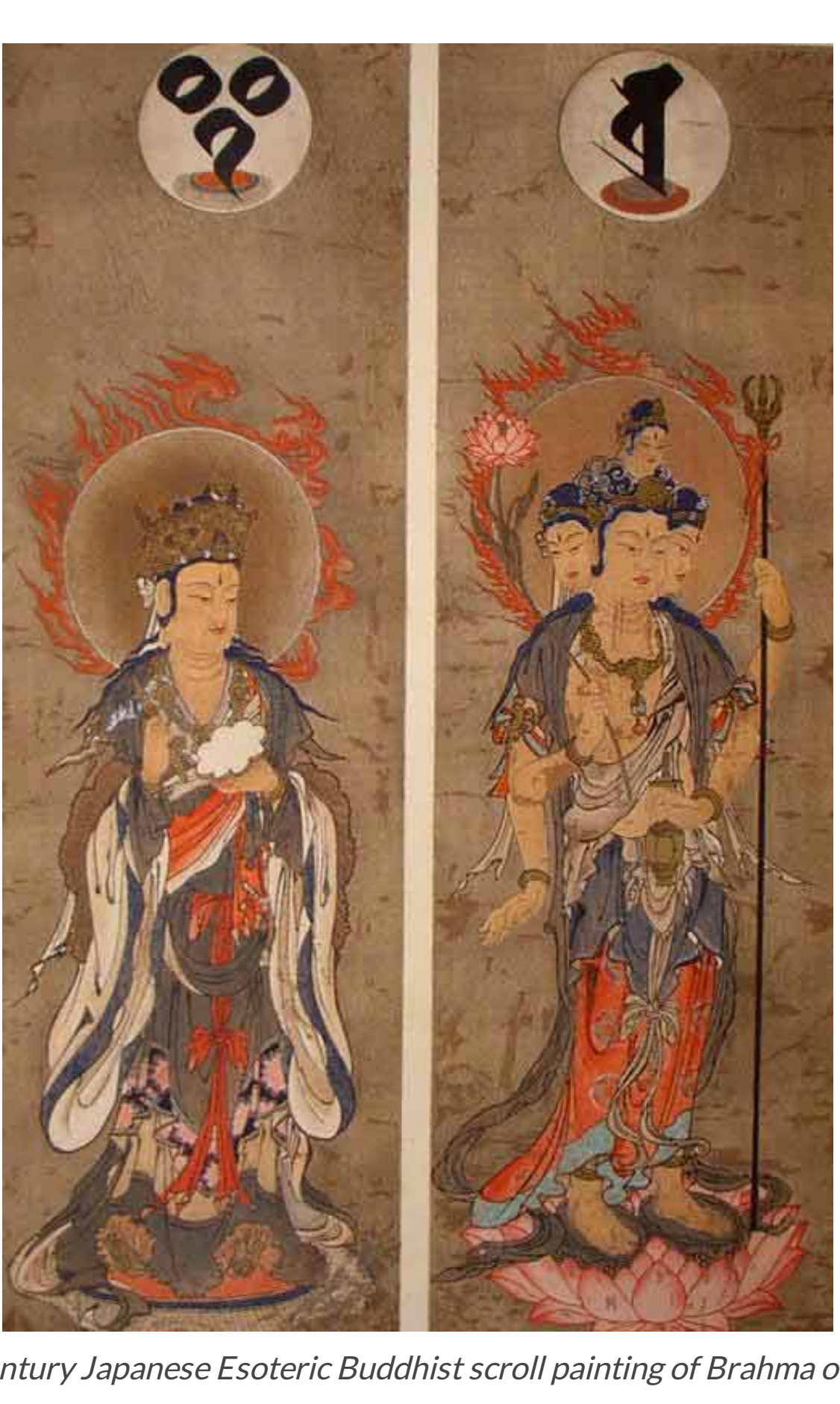
In Tibetan art, the Vajra prongs can be closed or open, representing peace and wrath alternatively.


88 THE HANDBOOK OF TIBETAN BUDDHIST SYMBOLS
Two peaceful vajras with closed prongs (left); and two wrathful vajras with open prongs (right).

An excerpt from The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols by Robert Beer. You can purchase this wonderful book here: http://goo.gl/M5MHm

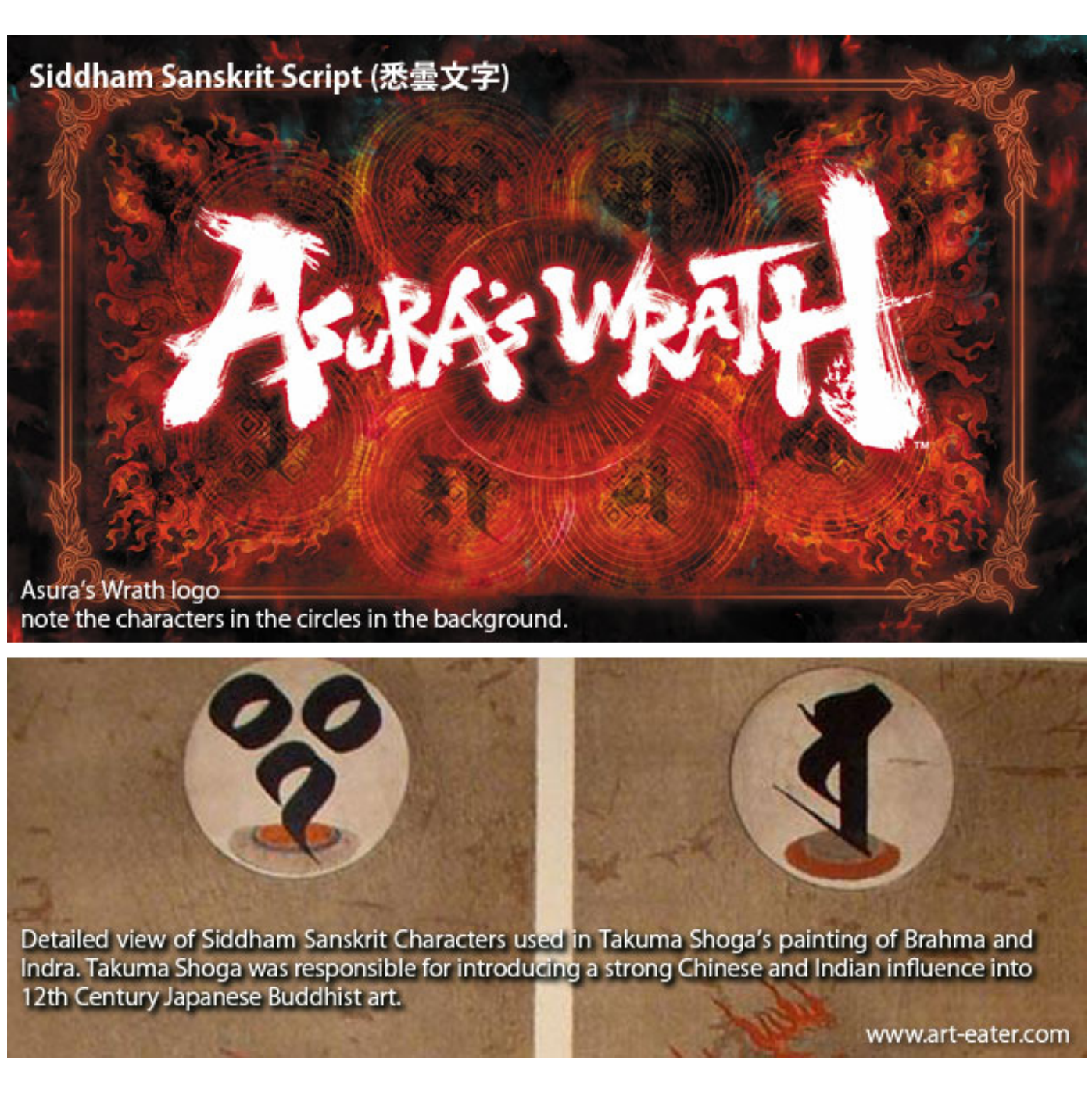
There are countless depictions of Buddhist deities brandishing Vajras from every school of Buddhism.

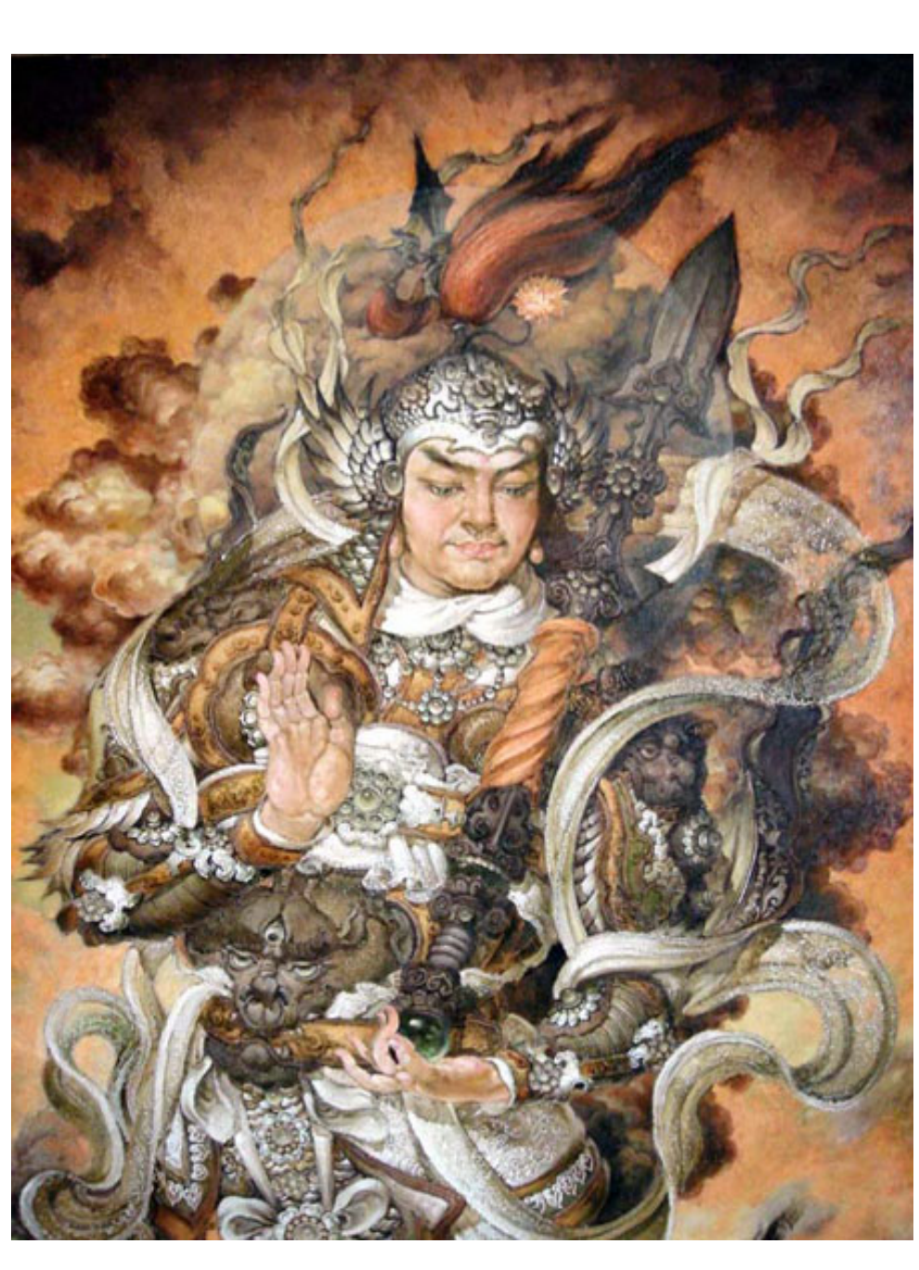
An early Indian Buddhist stone sculpture



A 12th Century Japanese Esoteric Buddhist scroll painting of Brahma on the right and Indra on the left by Takuma Shoga. Brahma is holding a trident with the tips bent inward, a closed Vajra tip. Indra is depicted brandishing a single-pointed Vajra.

Bonus Info – Siddham Script


Siddham Sanskrit Script (悉曇文字)
ASURA'S WRATH
Asura's Wrath logo
note the characters in the circles in the background.
Detailed view of Siddham Sanskrit Characters used in Takuma Shoga's painting of Brahma and Indra. Takuma Shoga was responsible for introducing a strong Chinese and Indian influence into 12th Century Japanese Buddhist art.
www.art-eater.com



A beautiful modern oil painting of Weituo, a Buddhist Deity dressed in Chinese armor who guards the grave of the historical Buddha. Weituo's Vajra is usually depicted as a giant spike, not unlike the spears sticking out of Asura in the concept art. If anyone knows the name of the artist that painted this, please let me know!

The above painting is by Beijing based artist, Zhang Kan (张瞰) from the Nepal and China Collection (尼泊尔中华寺收藏). It stands at 2 meters tall and is selling for 230,000 yuan ($36,415.44)! I'm glad this artist is doing well!

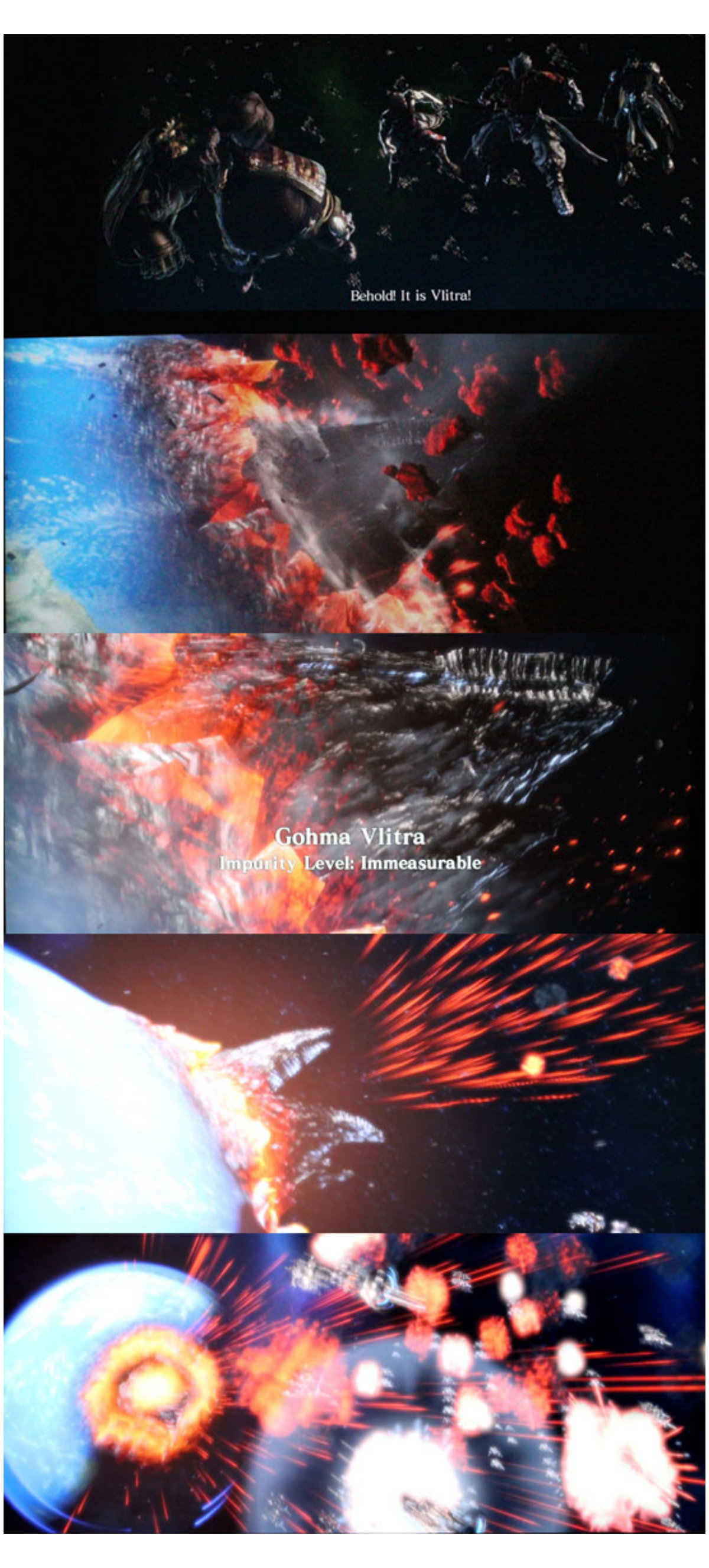
muza-chan.net

Nio Guardians aka classic temple guardians often brandish a single-pronged Vajra.

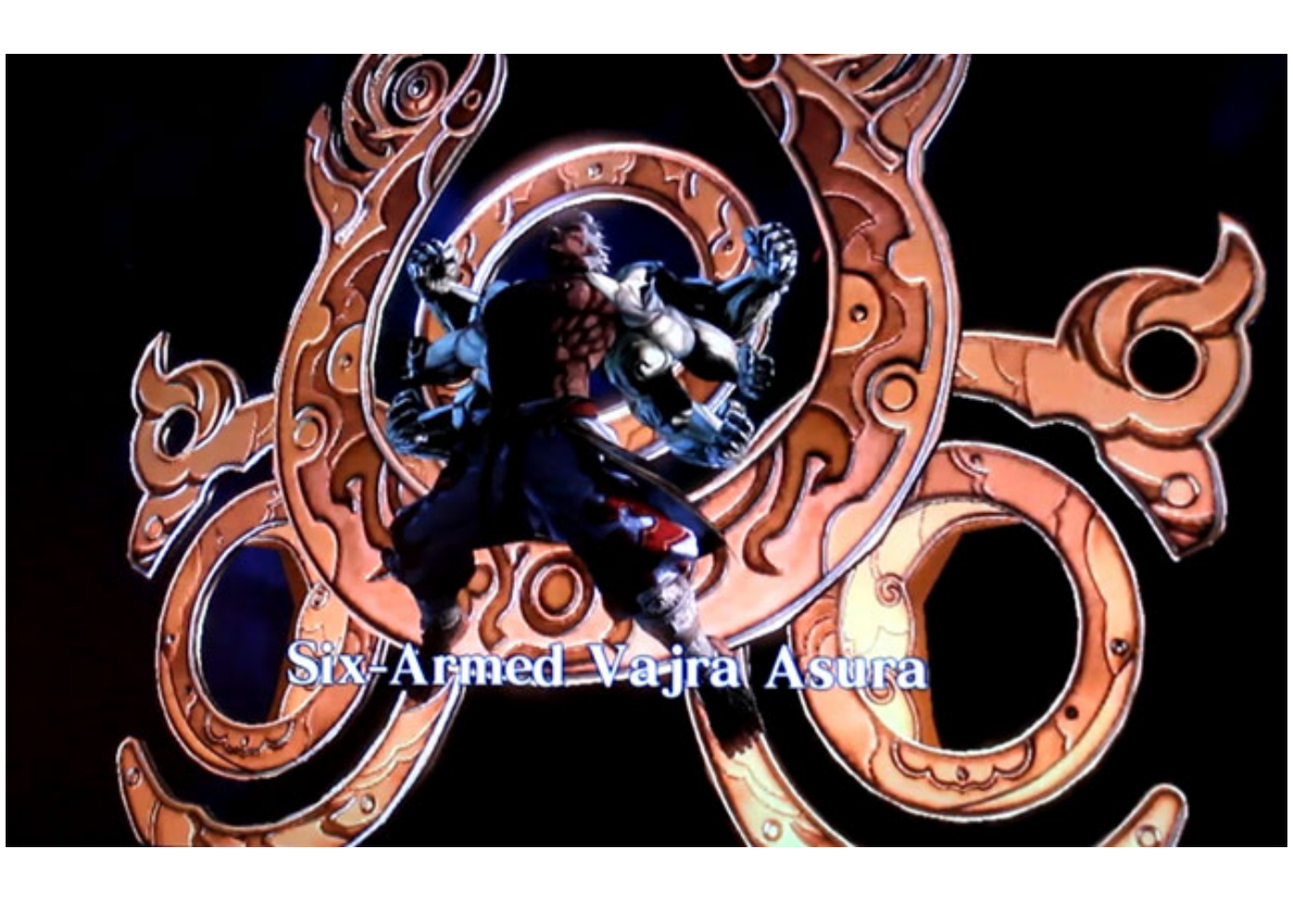
Vajras aren't exclusively for demigods, some historical figures are also popularly portrayed holding Vajras.

Tying It All Back To The Game – The Eight Guardian Generals vs Vlitra

The very first boss in the game is a gargantuan serpentine monster named Vlitra, a reference to Vritra, the aforementioned serpent of Vedic mythology that the Vajra was originally created to defeat.


Behold! It is Vlitra!
Gohma Vlitra
Impurity Level: Immeasurable

The Eight Guardian Generals are almost defeated by this terrible monster that destroys entire armadas of space ships with just a breath. However, when all seems lost, Asura is revived and empowered by his daughter, the priestess Mithra. In his charged up state, Asura sprouts extra arms and becomes…


Six-Armed Vajra Asura

SIX-ARMED VAJRA ASURA!!!

… and handily defeats the unkillable beast Vlitra!

As soon as I saw this moment in the game (and in the first episode no less) I knew the creators of the game were really doing their homework and I wasn't crazy for reading so much into it!

My hat's off to Capcom and Cyberconnect2 for putting together such a rich, well researched, immaculately executed narrative!

Thanks for reading this latest installment of A Buddhist's Guide to Asura's Wrath!

Full List of Asura's Wrath Articles Here:

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